



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Main Committee

GRIEVANCE DEBATE

Sewage Treatment

SPEECH

Monday, 22 February 2010

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Date Monday, 22 February 2010
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Questioner
Speaker Broadbent, Russell, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Mr BROADBENT (McMillan) (8.50 pm)—Madam Deputy Speaker Burke, long before your time, in 1990 the member for Brisbane, who has just spoken, came into this House with me. During my maiden speech I mentioned that I was a product of sewage. It was suggested to me by the member at the time that I would fit into the parliament pretty well if that were the case. There are few of us left from 1990 but, importantly, waste water was something that was part of my considerations going right back to 1990.

It was only 10 years ago in one of my stints out of this House that I decided that my father-in-law, who so loved game fishing off Bermagui—which he had done in his younger days for many years with his friend, Trevor Hardy, who had passed on—that along with my two brothers-in-law, Chris and Rod, we decided to take him back to Bermagui and just have four or five days there. For those who have been to Bermagui, it is a magnificent spot and is beauty personified. The waters are rich with fish and there are great people there.

We went back and did the reminiscing tour. We had a lot of fun in the pub that night. A lady named Colleen served us at the table and in conversation with her she said that her husband, Daryl, was in the bar and would love somebody to go fishing with him the next day. We thought that we would probably not feel too good the next day but would go fishing with Daryl. Those of us who could make it went fishing with Daryl the next day. As we went out of the gap out of Bermagui and then further out into the ocean and further and further out until the GPS stopped where we were going to fish, I looked around and we were surrounded by slimy, greenie, sludgy, mucky stuff. I asked Daryl: ‘What’s this? We are out here in the pristine ocean. What is this all about?’ He said: ‘That’s Sydney sewage.’ I said: ‘Are you telling me in your beautiful boat that we are fishing in Sydney sewage?’ He said: ‘Yeh, that’s Sydney sewage that comes out and then comes back in towards Bermagui with the currents.’

I have always dreamed that ocean outfalls would be ended once I entered the parliament in 1990 as it would be a matter of just making a decision with the ministers of the day, whoever they were, and that Bob Hawke or Paul Keating would come on side immediately and say, ‘Here’s the money.’

Time has moved on since then and we still have ocean outfalls and we are still doing nothing about it and this 2010. I think enough is enough. I think the time has come when this nation is old enough, wealthy enough and prepared enough to end ocean outfalls across this country. Am I asking too much? I do not think so.

In the process of recycling water I have always seen the ocean outfalls as capturing a resource, not getting rid of our rubbish. It is estimated that 450 million litres a day are poured into the ocean at Gunnamatta in Victoria alone, not to mention the scale across the rest of the nation. There are recycling schemes that you as a Victorian, Madam Deputy Speaker, would know where class A recycled water is used in vegetable growing market gardens. However, more can be achieved. While I was on the Pakenham Sewerage Authority, we were one of the first to supply water to a turf farm nearby that is still being supplied today. So, I was one of the early recyclers. When I was on the Mornington Peninsula Water Board it was the same.

There are 21 million people in Australia so we assume that at least 15 million of these people discharge their sewage into the ocean. The average amount of waste water per day per person is approximately 200 litres. That is all waste out of the house not just sewage waste. Therefore we have 3,000 million litres of waste water per day running into the ocean and the required cost of treating and distributing three billion litres of water per day.

The Carrum treatment plant, as you would know, Madam Deputy Speaker Burke, is about to be upgraded to class A standard, at a cost which will reach \$500 million. That means 400 million litres of water per day will be treated to class A standard for a capital cost of \$500 million. The existing class A recycled water plant at Carrum treats approximately 15 million litres per day. The cost to construct the plant was \$30 million, and then there was 60 kilometres of pipeline. This is a capital cost of \$2 per litre of water for treatment and distribution. Do not hold me to these figures, because they were given to me by a water engineer friend, and they are general. Therefore, the provision of three billion litres of water per day would cost \$6 billion in capital works to construct treatment plants and distribution networks, plus piping, across the nation. There would also be the additional

costs of operating the treatment plants and the distribution networks. A very approximate figure for that would be \$300 million per year, or \$60 million a week. It would change this nation from a net polluter of our oceans to a net receiver of a resource. Singapore was able to achieve this in 2½ years, because there was presidential will right down the line.

Not only is there the issue of recycled water; there is also the issue of capturing storm water wherever possible in our cities, which I have not even gone into today. I have also not talked about what is really important to me, which is that we have made a mistake in refusing to develop north Australia and the water resources that are available to us there. One day I will be in this place when Gary Gray will do a complete turnaround and look to the north for that resource—but I will go into that at another time. Singapore ceased being a net importer of water in 2½ years. Up until that time, Singapore's bilateral negotiations with Malaysia were over water. There is now no mention of water in their negotiations, because they had a direct will to change that.

The plan that I put before the parliament tonight is one which says: 'Can we stop pouring dirty rotten sewage into our oceans? We can clean up the oceans around this country. We can make a decision to reuse that water at a cost of \$6 billion to begin with.' How many times have we heard governments in this place say, 'We're throwing \$10 billion at that and \$20 billion at this, and this is what it will cost'? Why can't we as a nation have a capital works program like the Snowy River scheme? Why can't we have a program that captures the vision of every family and every child in every school in Australia that says: 'We believe that we are able to do this as a nation and, as a nation, we are not going to pollute the waters off our shores. We are not going to have fishing fields with rotten sludge across the top of the water that stinks. We are going to reuse the capacity of the ocean outfalls not only for fertiliser but also for fresh water—water that can regenerate our streams. We can have that water as a resource.'

It is not too much to ask to end ocean outfalls in Australia. I actually believe that one day, before I leave this place, Sydney town will, for the first time in 222 years, not pollute the waters outside Sydney and that Melbourne will not have ocean outfalls pouring pollution into the sea. We will be a country that leads the world in water reuse. Wouldn't it be fantastic if, like Singapore, we were able to say, 'No, we as a nation have decided that we are not going to pollute our oceans'? We have said to tourist cruise ships: 'Don't throw your rubbish into the ocean, as you've been doing for years. Bring it back to shore and we'll process it onshore.' Why can't we say to the whole nation: 'We're not going to have ocean outfalls. We're going to reuse that water. This is Australia. Water is important to us. And each city can be self-sufficient with the water that pours onto it by reusing the storm water—just the storm water. Each city can be independent without ocean outfalls'? The ocean outfalls could be used every day to reinvigorate the parks and the gardens that have been destroyed by the last 12 years of drought.

Is it wrong to have a vision for what the nation can be? We fight over plans and purposes that might go right or wrong for a government. Why can't we have a vision for Australia that is greater than one, two or three parliaments? It is \$600 million dollars a year for 10 years. (*Time expired*)